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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 004848

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#) [BM](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHINESE VIEW OF BURMA FROM THAILAND

REF: A. BANGKOK 04749

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 4803

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Classified By: Political Officer Mark B. Lambert for reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On August 7, the Political Officer from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China who covers Burma issues offered open and frank commentary on a wide variety of topics including PM Thaksin's recent trip to Burma, PRC relations with Burma, the move of the capital to Naypyitaw, Aung San Suu Kyi and the UNSYG candidacy of DPM Surakiart Sathirathai. End Summary.

Thaksin's Trip to Burma

[1](#)2. (C) PRC Embassy Political Officer Mr. Wang Shuai said that the Chinese Embassy had received very little information on Thaksin's visit to Burma the previous week. He said that they requested a briefing from MFA, but had only met with the Deputy Director General of the East Asia Affairs Department who, according to Wang, had absolutely no information on the trip short of what was already being reported in the media. Wang said that he was scheduled to accompany his Polcouns to a meeting on August 8 with the Director General of the East Asia Department and they hoped to get a more informative readout.

[1](#)3. (C) Wang was aware, in broad terms, of the August 4 briefing the Ambassador received from Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn (see Reftel A). Wang found the rationale offered by Krit to be particularly dubious (i.e. Thaksin concern that the message of mounting frustration in ASEAN and the rest of the international community was not being conveyed to Than Shwe). "Didn't UN U/S Gambari meet directly with Than Shwe in May? Don't you think he was able to deliver that message on behalf of the international community?" Wang asked. He then pointed out that the

Philippine Foreign Minister plans to travel to Burma in a matter of days and, as the current chair of ASEAN, would have been a much more appropriate party to convey concerns on behalf of ASEAN. Wang also noted the absence of any information on how Than Shwe responded to Thaksin's message. Poloff agreed and suggested that these would be good questions to ask during his upcoming meeting with MFA.

"China Owes Burma"

14. (C) Wang said that China has attempted to persuade the regime in Burma to be more open. He noted that when PM Soe Win visited China earlier this year he was taken to Shaanxi Province and Shenzhen to demonstrate the potential development that could come with opening up to the international community. However, Wang went on to note that the visit of Soe Win was largely irrelevant because "the real power in Burma is held by only two individuals" (i.e. Than Shwe and Maung Aye). Wang suggested that China had extended an invitation to the generals to make a similar visit to China, but neither accepted.

15. (C) Wang acknowledged some concern with the increasing isolation of the regime, but did not suggest the PRC could do much to steer the regime away from its current course. Wang said that the international community over-estimates China's influence with the SPDC. He then paused and said, "You must understand, Burma is not like the DPRK. China feels that the DPRK owes China. We helped them during the Korean War. But China feels that it owes Burma. During the period that China was closed to the world Burma helped us. Burma helped provide access for China to the rest of the world."

16. (C) Wang suggested that Vietnam might serve as a good

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example to the Burmese regime of how a country can develop by opening its economy to the outside world. He agreed that Indonesia also offered a positive example of a government previously dominated by the military that was able to transition to a democratic system without the military having to relinquish all of its power and influence.

17. (C) Wang went on to say that China is not overly concerned with the political situation in Burma, or with the fact that power is concentrated in the hands of a few elderly generals. He described the system whereby the regime has developed a small cadre with a vested interest in holding on to power. As the current rulers age and eventually die, younger officers are moving up the ranks to fill the void. Wang said that China is content to work with this system as opposed to having to adapt to a new one. Wang declined to speculate about who might be "moving up the ranks" in the Burmese junta.

ASSK

18. (C) Wang brought up the subject of Aung San Suu Kyi. He asked Poloff's opinion as to whether ASSK is a pragmatic person who could work with the SPDC to help solve some of Burma's problems. Wang said that he believes the regime is convinced that ASSK is overly subject to outside influences and that she will only be satisfied if the SPDC is completely removed from power. (Note: Leon de Riedmatten of the Henri Dunant Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, met with Poloff on July 31. In that meeting, de Riedmatten emphasized that in his recent conversations with Chinese interlocutors, the Chinese had shown "much curiosity" about ASSK. He said they were most interested in de Riedmatten's assessment of ASSK's willingness to work together with the SPDC to move Burma forward. End note.)

Naypyitaw - Controlling Civil Servants

¶9. (C) On the subject of the new Burmese capital of Naypyitaw, Wang volunteered his opinion that one of the main reasons the regime moved the capital was in order to "control civil servants." He said that the generals wanted to separate civil servants from Rangoon and its educated population, and put them in a place where information (and their activities) can be more easily monitored and controlled.

The Race for UNSYG

¶10. (C) Wang reaffirmed the PRC's position that the next UNSYG should be from Asia, but he stopped well short of indicating that China was leaning toward the Thai candidate, Surakiart Sathirathai (see Reftel B). Wang referred to the Sri Lankan candidate as "too old", said that the Indian candidacy will likely be made problematic by the expected entry of a Pakistani candidate, and shrugged his shoulders when Poloff asked about the South Korean candidate. Wang said that he suspects candidates finishing toward the bottom in the next two rounds of straw polling will withdraw from the race. Poloff asked if that assessment applied to Surakiart and Wang replied, "No, I think he will hold out until the bitter end."

Bio Note

¶11. (C) Wang spoke openly on a range of topics that are of mutual interest to the US and China. Thailand is his first overseas assignment after serving in MFA's North American Affairs Division in Beijing. Wang is open and progressive and is conversant in Chinese policy with the U.S., Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. He is a student of history -- particularly Ming and Qing Dynasty diplomatic

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history.

¶12. (C) Wang will return to the North American Affairs Division in Beijing in December 2006. After another tour there, he hopes to be posted to the U.S. Wang is part of a tandem couple. His wife, Zhang Ying, also works in the Political Section of the PRC Embassy in Bangkok. Her current portfolio includes ASEAN, EAS and cultural exchange activities. Based on previous contact, Zhang is relatively less candid, but equally talented.
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